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THE ROLE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERNATIONAL SECURITY, DISARMAMENT AND OTHER RELATED FIELDS

Working paper submitted by Colombia

Sub-item 1: Scientific and technological developments and their impact on international security

1. Research has transformed the nature of war and considerably increased its destructive prowess. The weapons and method of destruction used against man and his environment, such as carpet bombing and other modern methods of war aimed indiscriminately at military, civilian and environmental targets, warrant only condemnation. Ethical value judgements against unnecessary brutality have given rise to international laws for the regulation of war - the Geneva Convention. However, it remains clear - and recent history confirms it - that in this era of rapid technological progress, respect for those provisions of international law which regulate war has been considerably weakened.

2. The development of new technologies in military production. Arms producers see the arms market as a way of recouping the research and development costs involved in their own arms production. Innovations and increasing sophistication in the weapons offered in their turn create greater competition among arms producers and in the market. This competition generates an ever more sophisticated arms race and heightens the threat to international peace and security.

3. Science and technology have produced custom-made arms and military equipment for use by terrorists, mercenaries and other international criminals, which are freely sold in an international market open to drug traffickers and criminals of all types with sufficient purchasing power.

Moreover, mercenaries, aided by the latest technologies, train these criminals in the most sophisticated terror techniques, usually with a view to achieving the political and social destabilization of a particular country.

Sub-item 3: The role of science and technology in other related fields

CONTEXT

1. Although the end of the cold war has ushered in a new spirit of cooperation, we cannot, precisely at this decisive crossroads, lie back and hope that a brave new world will spontaneously emerge. There are unfortunately a great many conditions which could prove to be fertile ground for conflict and despair. Chief among these are the unmet social and economic necessities of a large majority of mankind.

2. Disarmament has fortunately become an integral element of current international relations, but the resources and manpower thereby freed must necessarily and logically be redirected at addressing those issues which, if ignored, will engender both future conflicts and arms races or stockpiling, rendering the goal of complete international disarmament a mirage.

3. It is axiomatic that disarmament measures are necessary in the interests of security and of safeguarding the welfare of future generations. However, should present trends continue, the unborn will realistically face greater threats to their well-being from the progressive and rampant destruction of this planet and its precious resources than from nuclear bombs. Moreover, rapidly diminishing resources promise to become another source of major conflict, while at the same time fuelling the continued deterioration of social and economic conditions in developing, and even developed, countries.

CONSIDERATIONS

1. If the goal of disarmament efforts is truly to make the world more secure, resources thereby freed or developed should be directed at bettering social, economic and environmental conditions which will otherwise quite possibly become sources of future conflagrations and tensions and thereby of regional arms stockpiling.

2. Science and technology have been crucial instruments in the configuration of the modern world, and are thereby vital in the redefinition of global priorities, with a view to addressing the basic needs of the world population.

3. Science and technology play an increasingly influential role in the prospects for economic growth and social welfare. However, they are also the great dynamic force that drives the race for arms at both qualitative and quantitative levels. Bearing in mind the enormous technological inputs required to maintain the global development process satisfactorily, the tremendous asymmetry that exists between research and development activities and resources for military purposes vis-à-vis civilian purposes, appears incomprehensible. This asymmetry reflects the technological capacity between

developed and developing countries. That is why there is an urgent need for the latter to promote cooperation, both among themselves and with the developed countries, in order to mature their capacity for fostering economic and social development, while responding to the new challenges that technological innovations give rise to.

In this context, the group of eminent persons convened by the Secretary-General last October to discuss peace, development and the role of science and technology recommended that the Centre for Science and Technology for Development should devote particular attention to the subject of converting military technologies for use in civilian activities and include that topic in its programme of work. Also, the United Nations Fund for Science and Technology for Development should allow the United Nations system to play a catalytic role in redirecting scientific and technological activities in the developing countries in response to the development requirements of the 1990s.

4. Should resources now devoted to military industries be redirected to the civilian sector, they would contribute much more to the international economy. Equitable economic development at a global level would surpass the arms industry as a motor of economic growth and industrial progress.

The United Nations study on the relationship between disarmament and development presents an interesting approach to the subject: if it were true that military expenditures had the effect of stimulating the economy of the industrialized countries, growth should be more sluggish in those countries where military activities are of less importance; however, those countries in which military expenditure accounts for a high proportion of gross national product are growing at a slower pace than those where the proportion is lower. Japan is a dramatic example of a country with low military expenditures and high growth and productivity rates; the economic miracle of the Federal Republic of Germany during the post-war period points in the same direction.

5. The diverse instruments, information and research available in military spheres at a global level should be redirected towards aiding efforts for preserving and protecting the environment, given that this constitutes a vital element in the promotion of sustainable economic and social development models.

6. In principle, Colombia is in agreement with the conclusions and recommendations put forth in the report of the Secretary-General entitled, "Charting potential uses of resources allocated to military activities for civilian endeavours to protect the environment" (A/46/364), and considers that they should be the basis for further analysis and discussion.